

Homily. 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.A. Australia Day. 25/26
January 2020.

This is a packed weekend. It's Australia Day; it's the Bush Fires Appeal in all parishes to be taken up after Communion and lastly, at Pope Francis's request, a Sunday dedicated to honouring the Word of God. This is where I want to begin, with God's Word spoken to us in the scriptures.

We know that hearing and listening are two related but different processes. Hearing is an act of our ears, which happens fine as long as we have no impairment. Of course, to hear we have to give our attention to what is being read and said to us. Hearing can't happen if we're off in another world, daydreaming. Listening, though, is something we choose to do. It requires concentration so that we can think about what's being read or said, processing the meaning in and under the words and sentences. Clearly we have to hear before we can listen, but hearing isn't listening, only the start of the listening process.

God speaks to us in and through the texts of the bible. Our first job is to hear, then choose to listen with the ears of our faith. This is how we get to understand what these holy words actually mean for us and for our world today. In the past when people decided not to listen to the voice of God given through the prophets, through Jesus, and through His apostles, they were described as being hard of heart, proud and obstinate. On this score the same applies now to us as ever it did.

The words of sacred scripture are full of meaning and power, full of Jesus, the Word of God Himself. We need to hear as if the Lord were speaking to us today, because that's exactly what's happening. In this sense the word of God is sacramental, particularly when heard in the assembly of the Church. God's sacred words convey the real presence of the Lord to us via our ears. Yet, as it is with any sacrament, these words won't be effective unless we choose to take the next step of faith by consciously listening to and pondering their meaning. Remember; sacraments are a relationship, an encounter, an action and partnership of gift and response. God freely offers us the gift and then, out of loving respect for our choice, awaits our response. There's no doubt that the gift is truly offered, but this encounter can't be fulfilled and fruitful without our active listening.

Australia Day is a traditional response to the arrival of Europeans on our shores, but it means more than this. It's about our shared identity and homeland, our respect and our pulling together for the common good. Concentrated listening to the reading, prayers and preface of the Mass will help us to understand our faith's perspective on this day. Let's be up front about this; the last thing we need is to end up in warring factions as were the Corinthian community in St. Paul's time, a division he spent years trying to heal. Instead, choosing to listen to our Lord with attention and confidence, responding with their urgency and generosity of the disciples will keep us united, walking as one on the way of Jesus.

Which brings me to the Bush Fires Appeal, another call on our kindness and generosity even though our own homes, properties and lives haven't

so far been imperilled. We want to help because those burnt out are our people. We feel for their suffering and loss which so easily could have been our own. We all share this land for better and for worse so what happens down there, out there and over there affects us all. Because of this bond I'm sure that we'll be generous, standing with each other as we always do in this ancient, challenging land we call our home.